



Morning Alert - Tuesday, May 23, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning News

NHK and NTV led with reports that one of the two men arrested by the Osaka police for obstructing official duties is believed to be Masaaki Osaka, who has been wanted for the killing of a police officer in 1971. TV Asahi led with a report that North Korea released on Monday a video of its latest missile launch. Other top news included a report that LDP lawmaker Hideo Onishi apologized on Monday for saying in the Diet that “cancer patients don’t have to work.”

Major front-page items in national papers included the Finance Services Agency's plan to probe the GOJ-affiliated Shoko Chukin Bank on suspicion of extending illicit loans, a GOJ policy of allowing commercial firms to use some radio frequencies originally set aside for police and firefighters, and the arrest of the leftwing activist Masaaki Osaka.

## INTERNATIONAL

### DPRK keen to acquire missiles

All papers took up yesterday’s announcement by the North Korean state media regarding a test-launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile called “North Star 2” on Sunday, highlighting the Kim regime’s apparent acquisition of advanced missile technologies, such as the “cold launch” method and the use of solid fuel. These technologies are essential for launching ICBMs that can reach the U.S. mainland. Noting that Kim Jong Un instructed his military to mass-produce and deploy the North Star, the dailies speculated that Pyongyang is keen to acquire a variety of missiles quickly with the goal of getting the upper hand in possible direct dialogue with the U.S. in the future.

## **GOJ perplexed by Trump administration's softening of policy toward DPRK**

Nikkei said the GOJ was perplexed by the Trump administration's easing of its tough line toward North Korea, as evidenced by Secretary of Tillerson's message relayed recently to South Korea's newly appointed special envoy Hong Seok-hyun that North Korea should "trust the U.S." on its promise to take no hostile action against the DPRK regime. Some GOJ officials speculated that Pyongyang has chosen to escalate tensions through missile launches perhaps on the assumption that Washington would not readily resort to military action. A senior MOFA official said, "The atmosphere has changed drastically this month, marking a sharp contrast to the heightened tension in April."

## **Japan to enhance sanctions**

Yomiuri reported that the GOJ is inclined to adopt stronger punitive measures against North Korea by potentially enforcing "secondary sanctions," quoting Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga as telling the press yesterday: "It is important to cause [the Kim regime's] hard currency to dry up and to prevent the transfer of materials and technologies for nuclear and missile development." Although Chinese firms and companies would be the primary targets of the proposed secondary sanctions, the GOJ will have to carefully work out the scope, timing, and other details so as not to trigger strong reactions from the Chinese government. Asahi said the GOJ is considering expanding the scope of North Korean individuals and entities whose financial assets are frozen.

## **Additional Japanese held in China for spying**

Most papers reported on Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga's acknowledgement yesterday that a total of six Japanese have been taken into custody at two locations in China since March this year, noting that Chinese authorities have held them on suspicion of espionage. At least 11 Japanese are currently being held in China on suspicion of spying. Four of the six recently detained were visiting China for geological surveys for development of hot springs. Sankei said the Xi administration is anxious to destroy "spy networks" to cement his grip on power.

## **Tension mounting in East China Sea over maritime surveys**

Asahi reported on growing friction between Japan and China and South Korea over maritime surveys conducted in the East China Sea, noting that the Chinese and the ROK governments are stepping up such operations by deploying vessels and drones in the vicinity of the Senkaku and Takeshima Islands probably in an attempt to assert their territorial claims to the disputed outcrops. The GOJ is employing autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) in waters near the Goto Islands off Nagasaki and the Yaeyama Islands in Okinawa to "safeguard Japan's maritime interests," according to a Japan Coast Guard source.

## **Abe's top aide met with Chinese official in charge of diplomacy**

Asahi reported on the disclosure by a source involved in Sino-Japanese relations that when visiting Beijing earlier this month to attend the “One Belt, One Road” economic conference, Prime Minister Abe’s executive secretary Imai met with Chinese State Councilor Yang on the sidelines. Since Yang is the Chinese official in charge of foreign policy, the meeting perhaps reflected the premier’s strong interest in improving ties with the Xi administration.

### **UN official criticizes Japan’s response to his concern about anti-conspiracy legislation**

Tokyo Shimbun gave top play to a written interview with UN Special Rapporteur on Privacy Joseph Cannataci concerning the letter he sent to Prime Minister Abe voicing strong qualms about the anti-conspiracy legislation. Commenting on the protest filed by the GOJ in response to the letter, the UN official said it was “just anger without substance.” Cannataci stressed that the GOJ’s letter of rebuttal failed to address a range of concerns that he raised about the bill, such as its restrictions on privacy and free speech.

In related stories, most papers said the bill will be cleared by the Lower House today.

### **Japan rebuts UN panel recommendation for reviewing comfort women pact**

Most papers reported that the GOJ on Monday released a document rebutting a recommendation submitted to the ROK government recently by the UN Committee on Torture regarding the 2015 comfort women agreement with Japan. The Japanese document stated that it is wrong for the UN panel to describe the victims as “sex slaves.” It also emphasized that the accord was warmly welcomed by the international community, including then UN Secretary General Ban, as a “final and irreversible settlement” of the history dispute.

### **Japan, Italy sign pact on defense equipment collaboration**

Most papers reported that Foreign Minister Kishida held talks with his Italian counterpart in Tokyo on Monday and signed a bilateral agreement on defense equipment and technology transfer with the goal of making joint development of defense hardware possible.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Big Three to skip Tokyo auto show**

Yomiuri reported on the announcement made yesterday by the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association that GM, Ford Motors, and Chrysler will not take part in the “Tokyo Motor Show” slated for autumn, emphasizing that although the Trump administration has taken issue with the bilateral auto trade imbalance, the Big Three’s skipping a key auto event perhaps shows that the automakers have little interest in the Japanese market.

### **China’s economic influence growing in Asia Pacific**

Mainichi took up the conclusion on Monday in Vietnam of a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade ministerial conference, noting that China's economic clout is rapidly expanding in the region due to America's withdrawal from the TPP. Because the Trump administration is set to pursue bilateral FTAs with regional partners, some ASEAN nations are being drawn to China's gigantic market. The daily said it is critical for Japan to urge Washington to return to the TPP quickly so as not to allow Beijing to take the lead in creating trade rules in the Asia-Pacific region. Other dailies filed similar stories.

### **Japan, WTO issue joint statement against protectionism**

All papers reported that following a meeting between Prime Minister Abe and WTO Director General Azevedo in Tokyo on Monday, the GOJ and the world trade body released a joint statement expressing opposition to protectionism and reiterating their commitment to promoting free trade. Noting that it is unusual for the GOJ to issue a joint statement with an international organization, the papers said the document was apparently meant to counter the Trump administration's policy of dismissing multilateral trade arrangements.

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